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DE RUEHN #2034 1301538
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 101538Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1575
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 002034

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2026

TAGS: PINS MOPS SO
SUBJECT: MOGADISHU FIGHTING PAUSES, AFTER INTENSE ACTIVITY

Classified By: D/PolCouns L. Peterson, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) The United Nations Security Office reports that fighting in Mogadishu has paused, following four days of intense conflict. The UN has received reports of 100 to 150 casualties (no break out yet of dead and wounded), while press reports indicate up to 85 deaths since May 7. Estimates from Mogadishu hospitals are that two-thirds of the wounded are women and children.

¶2. (C) Both sides in the conflict have been building up to a major clash for several weeks. It appears likely this round of fighting was sparked by a Court militia attack on a convoy carrying leaders from the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Combat Against Terrorism. The Sharia Courts claimed on May 8 that locations under their control had been attacked by Alliance forces, prompting them to respond.

¶3. (C) Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed of the Union of Sharia Courts announced an unconditional cease-fire in a May 10 radio broadcast. He reportedly indicated he did not care how the Alliance interpreted this action, saying the Sharia courts were doing this for the benefit of the people of Mogadishu. A spokesman for the Alliance countered that the Courts were standing down because they had run out of ammunition.

¶4. (C) In spite of the high number of casualties, it does not appear that there have been any significant losses of territory on either side. The high casualty count, according to the UN, is largely attributable to untrained militia members, who are indiscriminately spraying areas with bullets. There are indications that the Bakara market has twice sold out its ammunition stocks in recent days. The UN is aware of at least one breach of the arms embargo approximately one week ago, but is uncertain whether these weapons and ammunition are intended for Mogadishu or for forces inside Ethiopia.

BELLAMY